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ST. LOUIS GLOBE DEMOCRAT
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NEW SPARK FOR U.S. INTELLIGENCE

The mood of the nation has taken a turn for the better with an increasing acknowledgement that crippling U.S. intelligence forces was an error of major proportions.

One of the most encouraging signs of the changing times is the growing support for rewriting charters of both the Central Intelligence Agency and the Federal Bureau of Investigation. To fill the dangerous intelligence void that has been created, it is being proposed that the two agencies be granted increased powers in some areas while their methods in other areas be restricted.

The breakdown of effective U.S. intelligence-gathering was exposed first by events in Iran and followed up by the invasion of Afghanistan. The collapse was an inevitable price that had to be paid for handcuffing the country's security agencies.

The decades of the '70s left U.S. security wanting as a war of extermination was directed at the CIA and other units. The Hughes-Ryan amendment and the Freedom of Information Act took their toll. The Senate and House Internal Security committees were abolished.

The changes are paying off—for enemies of the United States. Distrust over the CIA's ability to guarantee total secrecy to informants is rampant. Foreign agents who formerly worked with this country have terminated their relationships and other spy networks decline to enter into cooperative arrangements.

FBI Director William H. Webster has complained in testimony before Congress that under existing law the agency is required to provide sensitive information and records to "any person...even a citizen of a hostile nation." As a result its sources are drying up.

National security is endangered when agencies are forced to broadcast their secrets. Good judgment was displayed by CIA Director Stansfield Turner who did not relay the information to Capitol Hill after his agency had learned that the Canadian diplomatic mission in Tehran was providing sanctuary to six employees of the U.S. Embassy.

The episode had a happy ending. Revealing the information prematurely to Congress would have had no beneficial effect. The ending could have been considerably different. A careless mention of the secret could have endangered both Americans and Canadians at the mission.

Questionable covert actions are not condoned. Controls and curbs in specific areas can be spelled out. However, reckless destruction of necessary intelligence functions is not the proper prescription.

Congress has wielded the axe without concern for U.S. security. An overhaul of the previous alleged reforms that actually obstructed the collection of intelligence is overdue. The White House reports that President Carter supports "relief across the board" for intelligence officers who have complained about the Freedom of Information Act.

Congress should rectify its own mistakes by restoring a cladestine capability to security agencies that it left half-dead and unable to look effectively after U.S. vital interests.

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